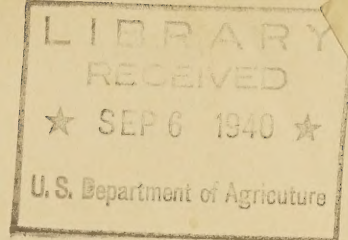


1941
P5P81

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Bureau of Agricultural Economics



POPULATION AND COMMUNITY PROBLEMS IN COUNTY PLANNING

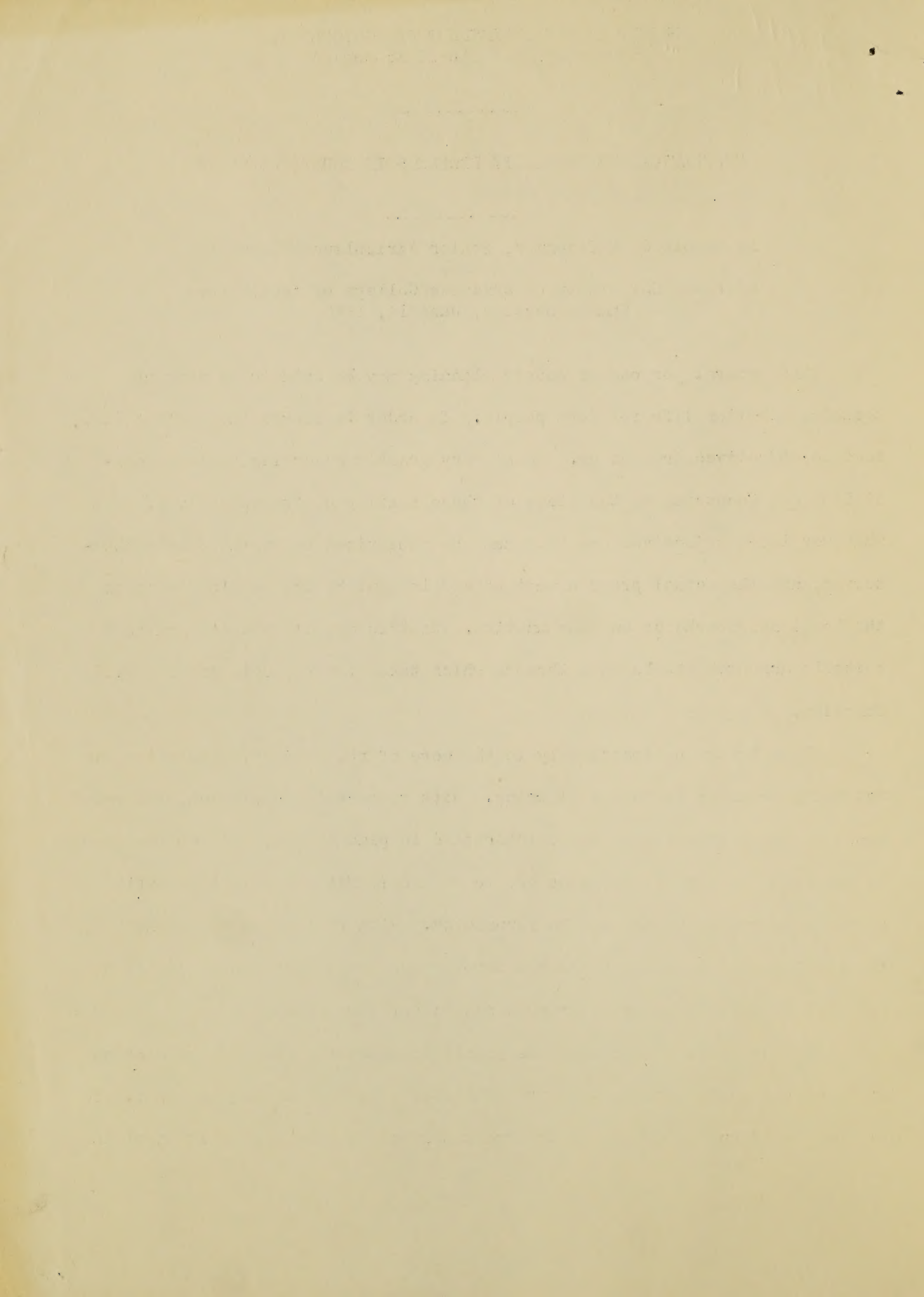
By Harold C. Hoffsommer, Senior Agricultural Economist

Address, University of Arkansas College of Agriculture
Summer Session, June 14, 1940

The general purpose of county planning may be said to be that of securing a better life for farm people. In order to secure this better life, certain objectives are set up. These vary greatly according to local conditions and according to the views of those setting up the objectives. But whatever these objectives are they must be subscribed to by the people themselves, and the actual program must be carried out by the people living in the local neighborhoods and communities. To this end it is necessary that suitable arrangements be made through which these local people can and will function.

This brings us immediately to the core of the subject, Population and Community Problems in County Planning. With respect to population, the chief question to be answered by those interested in planning is, Who are the people by whom and for whom these plans are to be made? Without this information a suitable program could hardly be formulated. With respect to the community, the chief question is, What are the natural groupings among these people by and through which a planning program can be carried forward?

Let us first center upon the population factor. The term population is usually used to embrace two sets of factors, biological and cultural. To be sure these cannot always be treated separately but the recognition of the

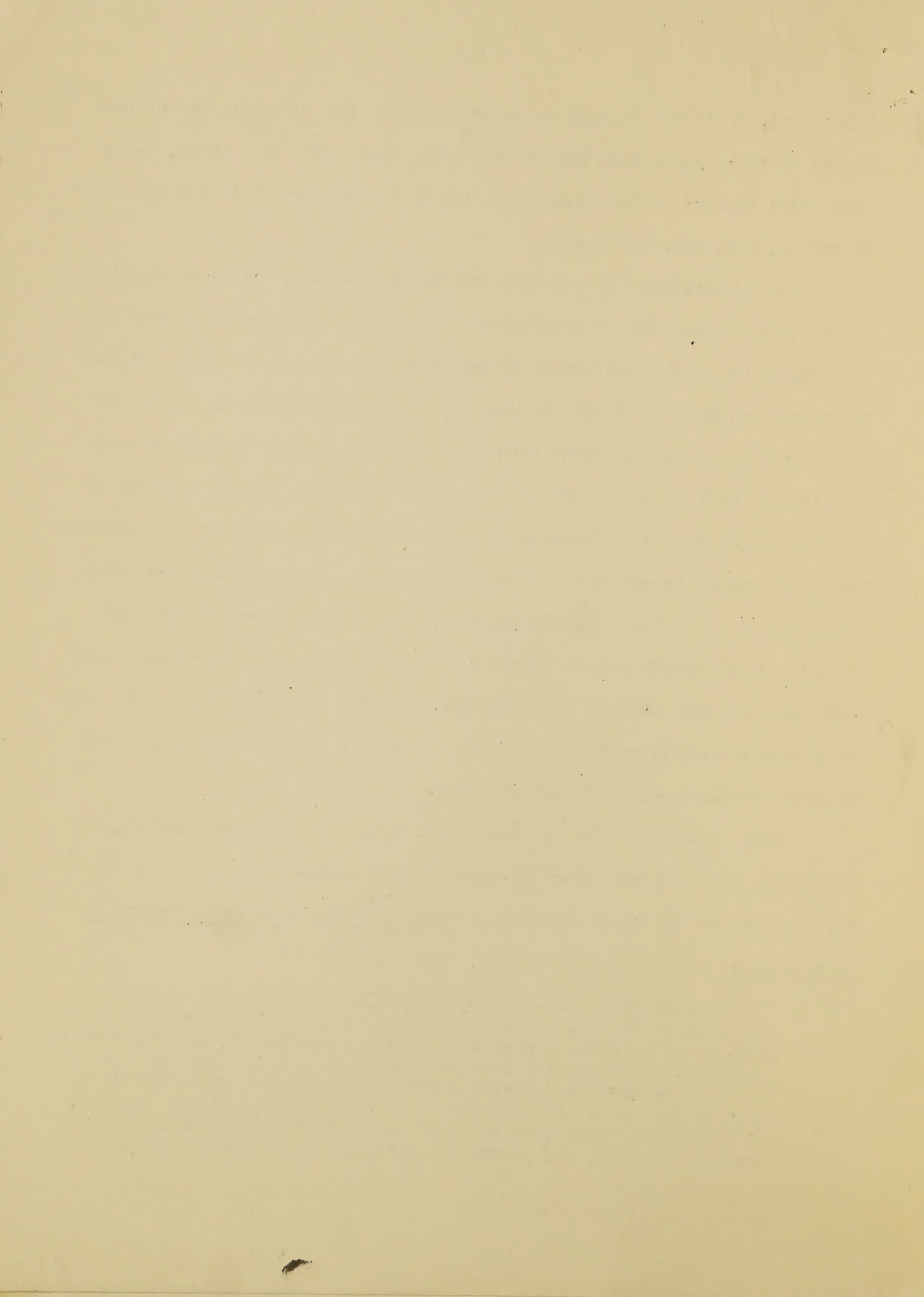


biological, or innate factors as contrasted with the cultural, or environmental factors, lends some aid to analysis. Among the first group, i.e., biological factors in the population, the most commonly considered are those of number, age, sex, and race.

Let us consider for a moment the simple factor of number or quantity of the population. The relation of the man to the land must be viewed from the standpoint of a given number of men to a given amount of land. Project leaders throughout the South are perplexed by the fact that the number of farm families in many of their counties considerably exceeds the number of commercial farms of paying size. Where then should the excess families go or what should they do? These excess families are not a result of planning, but their number is clearly seen by comparison of resources available with total number of families to be supported. Before the advent of rational planning these families had already felt the pressure; and, of course, many such families have already gone in search of jobs elsewhere. This situation of overpopulation is probably worse in the eroded and poor-land areas; but, it also obtains in the better-land areas.

Time apparently will not solve this situation of excess numbers, as it appears that the condition is becoming more acute. As pointed out by Dr. Metzler, in his recent bulletin, Population Trends and Adjustments in Arkansas:

Population pressure is especially great in rural areas in the Southern States. This has resulted from high reproduction rates and a relatively slow agricultural, industrial, and commercial expansion. Release from this pressure has normally been through migration to urban industrial centers in the North and to frontier areas in the West. The exhaustion of good frontier lands, however, and the recent disruption in trade and industry, have closed the migration outlets, and produced a situation of population congestion



which the normal methods of voluntary adjustment seem powerless to meet. 1/

The National Resources Committee, in commenting on the population situation in the South as a whole, concludes that even if normal migration to northern industries were to be resumed, the resulting adjustment would still leave a hypothetical four or five million surplus population in the Southern States. It therefore becomes apparent that simply the number to be supported on the land must be considered in relation to the quantity and quality of the land. It should be clear also that this adjustment cannot be made from the study of a particular farm, or even a particular county, but that the population of an entire area together with its land and industrial resources must be taken into account.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion concerning the welfare of those families who may be displaced by land planning programs. Yet it is obvious that those families who may have to change their relation to the land constitute an important problem since it is the total number of the population that must be taken into consideration.

So much for the factor of numbers of people as such. The other biological factors of the population are of equal importance. Little planning can be done without considering for example the factors of age and race. To illustrate - the minister who wondered why he didn't have more young men in attendance at his young people's meetings might be cited. Upon investigation it was found that nearly all the young men of his community had migrated elsewhere in search of better jobs. This type of example could be multiplied many times in illustration of the futility of planning without an adequate

1/ Metzler, William H., Population Trends and Adjustments in Arkansas, Arkansas Bulletin No. 388, (1940), p. 3.

knowledge of the make-up of the population group.

In addition to the biological factors of population, information also needs to be at hand regarding cultural qualities of the people. Qualities of occupation, community relations, education, religion, mobility, standards of living, health, attitude toward farming and general philosophy of life become factors of importance, regarding which information is necessary, for their adequate economic and social adjustment.

As stated by Carl Taylor:

There is probably no such thing as a perfect land-use adjustment. This is due not primarily to the incapacity of the physical and economic analyst and planner to determine what the highest use of the land could be, but to the fact that land-use adjustment projects and programs accept as their guiding criterion the welfare of human beings, and the welfare of human beings not only involves factors other than perfect adjustments to land but is never composed of a single group of fixed and invariable elements. The love for a certain farm, locality, or community, the pleasure that comes with doing accustomed and habitual things, and the pain that comes with making too drastic changes, together with certain esthetic or semi-esthetic pleasures related to scenery or recreational activities, and a desire for a degree of independence and even isolation, are all factors which go to make up the complex of life's satisfactions, and thus the welfare of the people. In other words, it is possible, and indeed probable, that a given family or whole group of families may be living in what to them is a very well adjusted situation, which does not at all meet the criteria of efficient land use.

It is unfair to labor this point, but it is unwise to disregard it. To say the least, those of us who accept without provocation the fact that 'land use is definitely a problem of human lives and human welfare' must understand human life and human welfare in considerable detail before we presume to plan land-adjustment projects and programs in terms of these social objectives. 2/

Having discussed very briefly some specific aspects of population and the problem of county planning, the relation of the rural community to county planning may now be considered. This may be presented by quoting at some

2/ Taylor, Carl C., The Human Aspects of Land-Use Planning, Land Policy Review, September-October, 1959, p. 8.

length from A Statement of Plans and Progress issued by the County Board of Agriculture, Culpeper County, Virginia, in December, 1939. Obviously the particular objectives cited in this report may vary widely from those needed in other counties. My purpose in presenting them is not to recount the specific objectives but rather to point out the particular way in which these objectives are approached through a utilization of community and neighborhood group alignments.

The major objectives of this unified program are as follows:

1. Development of well-organized rural communities with high standards of living, sound programs of adult education and definite programs of work.
2. Joint housing of all agricultural agencies and co-operative working relationship between all agricultural workers to prevent duplication and increase efficiency.
3. Make available to all farm families, particularly those on small farms or with low incomes, the services of all agricultural agencies.
4. Production of adequate supplies of food and food for farm and home needs.
5. Restriction of cultivation to those lands that, with good management, are best adapted to crop production.
6. Improvement of pastures including those developed on lands not suited to crop production.
7. Improved cultural practices which emphasize contour cultivation, winter cover crops, and crop rotations that include legumes.
8. The use of more adequate quantities of lime, phosphate and balanced fertilizers for improved production and land conservation.
9. Reforestation of all areas not suited to a permanent agriculture, improved management of all forest areas including farm woodlands and development of adequate markets and marketing facilities for forest products.
10. Continued improvement in the quality of livestock and in management practices.

11. Improved markets and marketing facilities.
12. The application of appropriate phases of the unified program to every farm and farm family.

NOTE: The agricultural phases of this program can only be made effective by making unmistakably clear the application of the program to the individual farm and by securing the cooperation of individual farmers throughout the county in its adoption.

With the above objectives in mind the report goes on to state that:

As a basis for attaining the objectives set forth.... to develop more effective application of the various phases of the program and promote the most complete and efficient participation by community groups and agencies, it is recommended that:

- a. Social and economic areas of the county be delineated as a basis for more equitably applying the county program.
- b. Community and neighborhood areas be delineated as a basis for community organization, programs, and plans of work.
- c. Demonstration areas which include from 15 to 20 typical farms be established in each community as intensive demonstrations of all phases of the unified program.

Following this in the report are additional points on organization and administration. The second main heading deals with Agriculture and Land Use; and the third with Social Organization and Development, an extract from which is quoted:

In considering the social organization and community life of the various areas, and of the county as a whole, the County Board of Agriculture finds that schools have been consolidated, rural churches have grown weaker and local organizations have largely disappeared. Those farm families with adequate transportation have generally tended to go to the larger centers, leaving the local neighborhoods and communities with an inadequate social organization or community life. The poorer families without adequate means of transportation have been left in the open-country communities with few social contacts. Those with transportation facilities who drift to the larger centers fail to find the intimate

associations and opportunities for participation and leadership necessary for the development of a stable kind of rural community life. It appears to the County Board that there are many complicated situations and conditions that require particular attention, chief among which are:

- a. There is a real problem to be faced in rebuilding community consciousness in all parts of the county. Educational and social gatherings, and community programs of work would bring the people of each community together and develop a sense of individual responsibility and participation in community affairs. In order to carry forward a unified program of agriculture and rural life in the county, some means will have to be found to develop efficient local organization and leadership.

Other points mentioned along the line of social organization and development have to do with youth problems, education, church cooperation, community work programs, programs for white and Negro disadvantaged, 4-H Club work, health, relief, and recreation.

The report recognizes the need for research in order to "provide data needed to develop a sounder program and to orient more properly the activities of agencies and organizations carrying forward the program". To this end the following social research and surveys are suggested: Analysis of neighborhood and community groupings, trends in social organizations, status of employment and mobility of high school graduates, mortgage indebtedness, standard of living studies designed to bring out the factors affecting levels of rural and urban living and incomes, off-farm-income studies to uncover important sources and the relative importance of supplemental incomes, and population and leadership studies. In addition to these more or less social studies are those recommending detailed soil surveys, farm management and cost of production, marketing, credit, forestry and taxation studies. Appended to the report are two maps of the county, one showing the social and economic areas and the other the communities of the county.

The lengthy comments made relative to the objectives and methods used in this particular county planning program were largely for the purpose of illustrating two items relative to the social aspects of county planning: (1) The need for the local neighborhood and community groups to be in on the ground floor in developing and carrying forward whatever objectives the county committee may set up. (2) To point out some of the more specifically social adjustments which need to be reckoned with in county planning work.

In clarification of the first point it may be specifically stated that "if you want people to participate in something, you have got to know where, for what purpose and with whom they will be willing to meet. Likewise, if you want to have people represented, you have got to know whom they are willing to let represent them".^{3/} These things can hardly be accomplished without a detailed knowledge of local neighborhood and community groupings. From the standpoint of the sociologist, therefore, one of the first steps in county planning is that of determining, describing, and appreciating the alignments of the local neighborhood and community groups with which he is dealing. There is no fool-proof rule of thumb by which this can be done, although sociologists have for years had techniques which have been proved relatively satisfactory and which are now being revised and adjusted to meet new circumstances. The fact remains, however, that neighborhoods and communities have individualities and although they can be definitely classified into major groups there yet remains adjustments to be made within these group classifications. For example, a church neighborhood is a definite type of neighborhood and needs to be treated accordingly. But there are many varieties of church neighborhoods, which the planner will need to recognize.

3/ Holt, John, Mimeographed Statement to the Alabama State Land Use Planning Committee, April 23, 1940

Some of the more obvious differences such a denomination, race, size of group, frequency of meeting, etc., are already objects of standard classification. But many of the more subtle differences have not as yet been adequately treated.

Having indicated the importance of neighborhoods and communities in county planning, it remains to point out the general techniques by which they may be delineated and described and their significance determined.

The term community is employed in a general way to signify the people living in an area tributary to the center of their common interests.^{4/}

Several items need to be pointed out in explanation of this definition. In the first place, the community is composed of people, but they are people living within a definite geographical area. In other words, the community represents a social group, which may be dealt with by the sociologist much as he deals with any other group, excepting that in the case of the community, the group in question is definitely restricted to a given area. The center consists of a town or village in which the people satisfy their major interests. Obviously, in this day of rapid transportation it is somewhat more difficult to determine community boundaries than in the horse and buggy days. On the other hand, these communities of interest still remain respite automobiles and good roads. Of course, not all households have automobiles, particularly in our southern rural districts, thus the old type of community tends to remain. On the other hand, when modern transportation is available to some and not to all, serious community maladjustments follow. As a result of rapid transportation, community lines are changing but this does not mean that they have disappeared, or in fact that they will ever disappear. In a community study

4/ This definition follows in general that given by Dwight Sanderson in The Farmer and His Community

now under way in the State of Mississippi, the development of the communities in a particular county has been traced through three definite stages, (1) the water navigation and ox cart stage, (2) the railway stage, and (3) the modern highway stage. To be sure the boundaries have undergone great changes, even the location of the centers in some instances. But the significant fact is that communities do remain and that the community of today is a lineal descendant of these earlier communities. By noting the direction of past changes it is even possible to forecast in some measure developments that will occur in the future - and to lay plans accordingly.

Communities are made up of neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are usually centered in one or two interests such as a church, school, or street. It is necessary to understand the nature of these neighborhood groups, their relations to each other and to the community as a whole if one is to have cooperation in working out a program of action in any given area. A knowledge of neighborhoods is of especial significance in determining representation on the county and community committees. It might, for example, be quite possible to have representatives of every community in the county on the county committee but still not have adequate representation because some of the more important neighborhoods in the communities were not represented. The neighborhood, as a close-knit personal, face-to-face type of group, becomes exceedingly important in carrying forward any type of action program.

As already mentioned, the techniques for determining community and neighborhood boundaries are rather well developed and have been utilized in numerous places. It is impossible here to go into the detail of these techniques although several approaches may be briefly described. The most simple is a type of reconnaissance survey. This approach is described by

Rapkin as follows:

In locating a community boundary line, locate the community center, then think in terms of how far from this center the people have things in common; such as, church, schools, trade, or other relationships. Then too, think of how far it is to the adjoining community centers. Somewhere between the center of your community and the centers of the communities which surround your community, there is a more or less natural dividing line. The people along this line have more things in common with either one community or another. This line should be considered as the community boundary line. 5/

The following statement, based on actual procedure in a Mississippi County in which we have just finished that phase of the work, gives a broad picture of the method used. It is not intended to be a formal statement of method but was originally written simply with the thought of giving an intimate account of procedure and general observations made at the time of the study.

If the worker comes into an area as a stranger it is necessary to spend some time in becoming acquainted. 5/ A few days should be spent in simply meeting people with no particular purpose in view other than to begin to feel at home, to develop a friendly attitude toward the people, and to cultivate their good will. One should avoid the danger of regarding people as a source of facts for statistical purposes. People respond generously to a friendly interest in their surroundings but give an entirely different response if they feel that they are being used as guinea pigs for research purposes.

If one is to understand why people are what they are and why they do what they do there are some important points to keep in mind. Learning to understand people either as individuals or as groups is

5/ Rapkin, A. H., Education Through Organized Community Activities, West Virginia Circular 307, December, 1935, p. 3.

6/ The writer is indebted for the major part of this statement to Herbert Pryor, who carried on the field work in this County.

not a high-pressure job. It requires patience, real interest in people, sympathetic understanding of their problems, and an attitude that gives to others full credit for their efforts to meet the situations of living. It is necessary that the worker be a good listener and that he weigh carefully the information assembled. The contacts must be made on the basis of an interest in people as well as on the basis of a knowledge of social problems.

At the beginning of the study a visit was made to the office of the County Superintendent of Education. This approach was used because the school system is entering a period of readjustment in this County and the schools are a main center of neighborhood and community interest. The following information was gathered: (1) the names of white and colored consolidated schools in the County with the name of the superintendent or principal, the number of teachers and the enrollment of pupils for each school; (2) the names of the unconsolidated white and negro school districts with the name of the principal or teacher and enrollment of pupils. The school districts with the location of the schools were spotted on a map. Information with regard to the County school organization and the sources of funds for maintaining the schools was also obtained.

With this information at hand a short visit was made to each school. This visit formed the beginning of the study of rural neighborhoods and communities in the County.

During the study contacts were made with people in the various neighborhoods and their neighborhood history, their folk lore and customs, their institutions and organizations were studied. A list of informed people, who might be available for interviews, was at hand.

On the list were the names of the County Agent, leaders of the various Federal agencies, some of the County officers, including the superintendent of education, other political and social leaders, citizens of long residence in the County, and others familiar with County history. A road map of the County was available. A map showing the location of rural dwellings was needed but this had to be worked out during the progress of the study. With the road map at hand information was sought in regard to various areas and groupings in the County. The people interviewed were asked to name and locate on the map all of the major centers of the County, the high schools, the grade schools, the churches, the open country stores, and the areas having names without centers; to indicate the various names for each area; and to specify the name most commonly used.

While this information was being assembled, trips were made into the areas tentatively located on the map and conversations were held with people living within these areas. In seeking information in regard to neighborhoods and communities from the people and in enlisting their aid, the method was not the same in all cases. An effort was made to avoid a routine procedure and the conversations were suited to the individuals who were telling the story. The following questions were asked:

What is the name of the neighborhood in which you live?

What services are offered by the area, such as schools, churches, stores, recreation?

How large an area is included in your neighborhood?

Can you locate on the map the service areas for your neighborhood center?

Do the people in your neighborhood have a feeling of belonging in the neighborhood?

What are the things that the people in this area do together?

Are many of the people related to others in the neighborhood?

Are members of the early pioneer families still important members of the neighborhood?

Where would you draw the boundary line on the map to include the people who feel that they belong to your neighborhood?

What is there about your neighborhood that makes it distinct and sets it off from the other neighborhood areas?

To what community center does your neighborhood belong?

For what things do you go to the community center?

Where would you locate the boundary line on the map to enclose your community?

What other outlying neighborhoods have a feeling of belonging to your community?

How has this feeling in the neighborhood of belonging to the community expressed itself in the past?

Why does your neighborhood feel more strongly attached to your community area than to some other community area?

Personally, do you think that this feeling is justified?

Will it continue?

Is it growing stronger or weaker?

The above method is satisfactory when not too much detailed description is needed of the population residing within the neighborhoods and communities. That is to say, it is one thing to delineate neighborhoods

and communities but it is quite another to describe in detail the population living within these delineated areas. This method likewise does not give as great an amount of detail as might be desired regarding the various service areas which go to make up the neighborhoods and communities. These service areas can be of specific use when dealing with particular interests which they represent. Something over 10 years ago I worked out my doctoral dissertation in New York State on the subject of the rural community. The procedure which I used at that time was quite laborious, involving interviews with some 3600 families - three-fourths of the total number in the county. After determining the service areas in the county, these areas were then combined into composite or community areas. The areas of these services were determined by the spot-map method. Three distinct steps in this method may be noted:^{7/} (1) the interview; (2) spotting the map; (3) drawing the area.

The interviews were distributed approximately equally over the county. The clock index number of each farm was noted on the schedule. With those index numbers it was possible to locate on the clock index map any farm in Wayne County. Unfortunately, such index maps are available for only a very few counties in the United States. It is possible without undue labor, however, to construct a base map showing the location of residences of all open country families in any given county.

In spotting the map each village in the county was given a color. The clock index map was then covered with a transparent map of the same size and the areas were spotted. For example, the schedule included this question: "To what nearby village or town do you most frequently go?" Mr. A. replies "Sodus". Sodus has been given the color red. Accordingly a red dot is placed

^{7/} Adapted from Harold C. Hoffsonner, Relation of Cities and Larger Villages to Changes in Rural Trade and Social Areas in Wayne County, New York, Bulletin 582, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, Ithaca, New York.

on the map at farmer A's place. His neighbor B in response to the same question answers, "Alton". Alton has been given the color green so that a green dot is spotted on the map for farmer B. When the entire county had been spotted for a particular question it was then possible to proceed in drawing the area.

The procedure in drawing the area was simply to draw a line around the spots of like colors. This was complicated by the fact that the red and the green spots, for example, were quite intermingled, especially at the periphery of the areas. That portion of the territory was included in the area which showed a majority of spots of the color in question. If the number was equal, the territory was excluded and appeared on the map as an interstitial area.

Naturally the number of areas in the county for the various services varied greatly. Church-attendance areas were most numerous (34) while areas for the purchase of men's and women's fine clothing were least numerous with only 7.

We are now using a variation of this method in a Mississippi County in connection with the Mississippi study mentioned above. Instead of interviewing the households directly, the information is being gotten through the school children under the supervision of their teachers, to whom the project was previously explained. Simplified schedules were filled in by the children giving the necessary information. A number of the schools became quite community conscious during this process and the effect in all seems to be quite educational. When information is thus secured on a family basis, a considerable amount of population information is also obtained which can be correlated with the land use or other areas found in the county. One of the major limitations in the use of census material as a background for county

planning information is that the census areas do not usually correspond with the problem areas to be considered. That is to say, the planner frequently wants to know just what kind of population is living on a given type of land, or other area type. This can be readily ascertained by the method suggested above. In one of the Louisiana counties in which the planning program is being carried on, certain areas have been designated by the land use people as "problem areas". They are most anxious to know just who is living in those areas so that they may better approach the problem of land use adjustment

At the outset of this paper, I stated that the county planner was necessarily interested in the population and the communities of his area. If county planning is a democratic procedure then it must be carried on by and with the cooperation of the people involved. These people are aligned in certain groupings, the recognition of which may well be the determining factor in the success or failure of the program in any given area. Techniques for handling population and community problems, while not entirely standardized, are being used to good advantage. There is much room for improvement, however, and it is to be hoped that additional emphasis may be placed on these aspects of the problem in future planning.

